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Bat researchers to attend conference hosted by IWU

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Oct. 23-26

Bat researchers to attend conference hosted by IWU
Special bat education, conservation workshop
slated for Illinois educators

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Forget Michael Keaton, Val Kilmer, and George Clooney. About 100 *real* bat men--and women--from across the country will converge on Bloomington-Normal next month for the 26th Annual North American Symposium on Bat Research, hosted by Illinois Wesleyan University.

Merlin Tuttle, founder of the Austin, Texas-based Bat Conservation International (BCI), will be among the Oct. 23-27 conference's keynote speakers. Tuttle, a bat guru, has written about 45 papers on bats, according to one published estimate. His latest book, "America's Neighborhood Bats," focuses on bat behavior and biology. His August, 1995, National Geographic article, "Saving North America's Beleaguered Bats," contains the latest information on bat conservation. According to a Philadelphia Inquirer report last year, BCI, founded in 1982, has a staff of 22 and more than 12,600 members in 55 countries.

The symposium will attract about 200 participants, including researchers from North America, Russia, England, Scotland, and elsewhere, who will share their research findings. It will be at Jumer's Chateau, 1601 Jumer Dr., Bloomington.

Special Teacher Workshop

Highlighting the conference will be a special teacher workshop--Education Symposium on Bats of Illinois--for elementary, high school, and other Illinois educators interested in ecology and conservation. Topics will range from bats of Illinois and the benefits of and threats to bats, to bats and public health and "Using and Creating a Bat Traveling Trunk," an innovative educational exhibit with a \$950 price tag per copy.

The workshop's goal is for educators to learn about many aspects of bat biology and conservation and become aware of the many teaching tools about bats available to them. The workshop will provide educators with information and materials they can use in the classroom and is designed to spur development of a regional network of people knowledgeable about bats.

The workshop is funded by a special grant from the Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund. Therefore, all Illinois teachers may attend free-of-charge.

IWU's Tom Griffiths is Program Director

Thomas A. Griffiths, IWU professor of biology and a noted bat researcher, is

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symposium director. Griffiths won IWU's top teaching honor in 1990 and in 1991 was named one of the nation's best college teachers by Rolling Stone magazine.

Over the years, Griffiths, has been pummeled with a lot of bad bat questions--Where's Robin?, Do you have bats in your belfry?, and Are you a little batty?

However, Griffiths points out, bats are no joke.

"Bats are declining in the world," he explains, "and they are very beneficial. They pollinate flowers and they eat insects."

Griffiths points out that bats can eat an insect every seven seconds on average, an activity that can go on for a two-hour stretch every night. Of particular importance to farmers, bats consume millions of the worst insect pests, including the adult stage of the corn root worm borer.

It's estimated that there are about 1,000 types of bats, composing about one-quarter of all mammal species.

Threats to Bats

In a recent grant proposal to the Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund, Griffiths and two colleagues wrote: "Bat populations in the U.S. are declining rapidly. To date, about half of our 43 species, including two in Illinois, are federally listed as either threatened or endangered, or are candidates for such status. Reasons for this trend include habitat loss, intentional destruction by humans, exposure to pesticides, and inadequate wildlife protection laws. The intentional harassment and destruction of bats is the single most important cause of bat population losses.

"Much of this occurs," Griffiths and his colleagues added, "because most people know nothing about bats and mistakenly fear them due to centuries of myth and superstition. Today, in many areas around the country where outreach and education efforts have been conducted, bats are now respected, appreciated, and in some cases, even celebrated."

"Bats are the farmer's friend since they eat rootworms," Griffiths said. "We're trying to make people aware of the benefits of bats and their importance all over the world. They are harmless--but beneficial--animals."

Symposium, Workshop Highlights

Among bat symposium highlights will be research papers delivered by undergraduate and graduate students. The best papers will win \$500 awards. Scientists also will make presentations. Topics on the conference agenda include bat anatomy and development,

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behavior, conservation, ecology, evolution, physiology, and genetics/biochemistry.

The special teacher workshop on the bats of Illinois will convene, Oct. 27, from 8 a.m.-2 p.m., at Jumer's. The tentative agenda and list of speakers include:

- Opening Remarks by Pat Morton, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department.
- Bats of Illinois by IWU's Griffiths.
- Bat Anatomy and Physiology by Gary Kwiecinski, University of Scranton.
- Echolocation and using bat detectors by Brock Fenton, New York University, Ontario.
- Benefits of and Threats to Bats by Brian Keeley, Bat Conservation International.
- Bats and Public Health, public health specialist TBA.
- House Bat Management by Bill Kern, Jr., University of Florida-Gainesville
- Teaching About Bats (case studies and examples) by Jackie Belwood, Cincinnati

Museum of Natural History.

- Bats of North America by Merlin Tuttle, Bat Conservation International.
- Special Presentation, "Using and Creating a Bat Traveling Trunk." The traveling trunk contains books, videos, posters, specimens and information sheets, laminated photos and drawings, data sheets, brochures, a tape recorder and bat echolocation tape, a bat detector and information sheet, a model bat, and other items.

Tom Griffiths' Background

Griffiths, a native of Maine, joined IWU's biology department in 1981. For the past dozen years, he has been a research associate in the Department of Mammalogy, at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. Prior to joining the IWU faculty, Griffiths taught at the State University of New York, College of Arts and Sciences, in Plattsburgh. He earned a bachelor of science degree in biology from Bates College, a master of science degree in zoology from the University of Vermont, and a doctorate in zoology from the University of Massachusetts.

The March 21, 1991, edition of Rolling Stone profiled Griffiths as one of the nation's top professors in an article, headlined, "Class Distinction--An honor roll of top profs from around the country."

Rolling Stone observed: "Thomas Griffiths' office is a bat cave of bat hats, bat cartoons, even a Christmas bat to top the tree. All are gifts from devoted students to this cheerful . . . teacher, who also makes house calls, bat net in tow. Naturally, they call him the Batman."

Commenting on Griffiths' Rolling Stone honor, another newspaper observed: "One look

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around his second-story office with its bat skeletons, anatomical sketches and formaldehyde jars full of bats awaiting dissection, and it is clear to even the casual observer why . . . Griffiths is known to many as "The Batman."

Interest in Bats

Griffiths has been interested in bats since he was a Bates College sophomore, when he drove through New England and Canada on a six week project with a professor and five other students, placing aluminum bands on bats to help track bat migration patterns.

"Bats are fascinating in so many ways," Griffiths said. "They are the only mammals that fly, they fly at night, and they echolocate. My research has focused on how they echolocate. Bats also hibernate and they eat things like fruit and insects, some are carnivorous, some eat frogs--and some drink blood." Griffiths quickly notes the three blood-drinking bat species are in South America--not Transylvania or Illinois.

Griffiths points out that bats don't have an "image" problem in all societies and cultures. While bats may be seen as creepy and scary in Europe, they are viewed as harbingers of good luck in China and elsewhere in the Far East. Observers note that much fear and misunderstanding about bats comes from the fact that bats are small and nocturnal.

Jacqueline Belwood, Patricia Morton Profiled

Joining Griffiths in hosting the conference are Jacqueline J. Belwood of the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History and Patricia A. Morton of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Belwood, a research assistant in vertebrate zoology, has worked at the University of Florida as a research scientist, at Bat Conservation International as interim science director, and at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama as a pre-doctoral fellow. She earned a bachelor of science degree from Carleton University (Canada) and master of science and doctoral degrees from the University of Florida.

Morton, who coordinates education and technical assistance programs involving endangered resources, has worked for Texas A&M University at Galveston as a research associate and Bat Conservation International as education director. She earned bachelor and master of science degrees from the University of Wisconsin.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,900 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. A \$15 million athletics and recreation center opened in the fall of 1994; and a \$25 million science building opened in the fall

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of 1995. The \$4.6 million Center for Liberal Arts--a facility housing 60 faculty offices, six classrooms, and other facilities for social science, humanities business and economics, and interdisciplinary studies' faculty--is slated to open next August. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to a "Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 161 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition.

Editor's Note: To arrange interviews with Tom Griffiths, IWU professor of biology, or other scientists attending the 26th Annual North America Symposium on Bat Research and the Teacher Workshop, Education Symposium on Bats of Illinois, call IWU Public Relations-News Services, 309/556-3181. Symposium and workshop sessions are open for news media coverage.